

IN THE CLAIMS:

The following listing of claims below will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A vehicle hinge for coupling a flap to a vehicle body of a vehicle, comprising:

- a first link,
- a second link,
- a first spring,

wherein the first link and the second link are each to be respectively arranged pivotably on the vehicle and on the flap of the vehicle,

wherein, when the flap is closed, the first spring pretensions the flap in an opening direction,

wherein, starting from a closed position of the flap, the vehicle hinge opening movement comprises a first opening phase of the flap and a second opening phase of the flap subsequent to said first opening phase of the flap,

a tensioning device tensioning the first spring in a the second opening phase of the flap, and

a locking device retaining the tensioned first spring.

Claim 2 (previously presented): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first link and the second link are pivotably mounted in a first fastening part assigned to the body, and wherein the first link and the second link are pivotably mounted in a second fastening part assigned to the flap.

Claim 3 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first spring is designed as a leaf spring, and wherein the leaf spring acts upon one of the first link and the second link for pretensioning the flap.

Claim 4 (previously presented): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 3, wherein the leaf spring

has a convolution projecting in a direction of the link upon which the leaf spring acts and, when the flap is closed, bears in the region of the convolution against the acted-upon link.

Claim 5 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 3, wherein the leaf spring acts upon the longer of the first link and the second link for urging the flap in the opening direction.

Claim 6 (previously presented): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 3, wherein the acted-upon link shows, in a coupling region with the body, a projecting section for tensioning the leaf spring when the link upon which the leaf spring acts is pivoted, wherein the projecting section is a part of the tensioning device.

Claim 7 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shorter of the first link and the second link includes the tensioning device for tensioning the first spring in a region of its body-side coupling.

Claim 8 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein, before a completely open flap is reached, the first spring is pressed back into its starting position by the tensioning device, and wherein the locking device holds the first spring in a locked position when the flap is lowered.

Claim 9 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein the locking device includes a second spring pretensioned in a direction of a path of displacement of the first spring, and wherein the second spring forms a stop in the direction of the path of displacement of the spring.

Claim 10 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, further comprising means for releasing the locking device before a subsequent opening of the flap.

Claim 11 (currently amended): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 10, wherein the release means disengages the locking device after a predetermined position of the flap, preferably ~~a~~ the closed position of the flap, is reached.

Claim 12 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 10, wherein one of the first link and the second link is pretensioned by the first spring, and wherein the release means are arranged on said pretensioned link.

Claim 13 (previously presented): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 10, wherein the release means is defined by a portion of one of the first link and the second link, said portion protruding to define a lug.

Claim 14 (currently amended): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a drive unit for driving the vehicle hinge over the complete movement in at least one of ~~an~~ the opening direction and a closing direction.

Claim 15 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 14, wherein the drive unit is a gas-filled spring pretensioning the flap in the opening direction.

Claim 16 (currently amended): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein a section assigned to the first spring is in contact with the second link when the flap is in a the closed position, and wherein a section assigned to the first spring is in contact with the first link when the flap is in an at least partially open position.

Claim 17 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first spring is pivoted as it relaxes corresponding to a flap angle of between 2° and 12°.

Claim 18 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein an opening movement brought about by an initial acceleration of the first spring merges continuously without a step into an opening movement brought about by a gas-filled compression spring.

Claim 19 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first spring is out of contact with the flap, with the first link and with the second link during a part of the opening movement of the flap.

Claim 20 (previously presented): A vehicle hinge, comprising:

- a first link and a second link coupling a flap to a vehicle body,
- a first spring pretensioning the flap in a closed position into an opening direction during a first opening movement phase of the flap,
- a drive member tensioning the flap into an opening direction throughout the opening movement of the flap, and
- a tensioning device tensioning the first spring in a second opening movement phase of the flap.

Claim 21 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 20, wherein the drive member is a gas-filled spring.

Claim 22 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 20, further comprising a locking device for retaining the first spring tensioned in the second opening movement phase.

Claim 23 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 22, wherein, before a completely open flap is reached, the first spring is pressed back into its starting position by the tensioning device, and wherein the locking device holds the first spring in a locked position when the flap is lowered.

Claim 24 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 23, further comprising means for releasing the locking device before a subsequent opening of the flap.

Claim 25 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 20, wherein the first spring is a leaf spring acting upon one of the first link and the second link for pretensioning the flap.

Claim 26 (currently amended): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 25, wherein the link upon which the leaf spring acts is pretensioned by the first spring in ~~an~~ the opening direction of the flap only during the first opening movement phase of the flap.

Claim 27 (currently amended): A vehicle hinge, comprising:

a first link and a second link coupling a flap to a vehicle body,
a first spring pretensioning the flap into an opening direction ~~while the flap~~ while the flap is closed, and

wherein, starting from a closed position of the flap, the vehicle hinge opening movement comprises a first opening phase of the flap and a second opening phase of the flap subsequent to said first opening phase of the flap

a tensioning device tensioning the first spring against a pretension of the first spring in a the second opening movement phase of the flap,

such that before a completely open flap is reached, the first spring is pressed back into its starting position by the tensioning device.

Claim 28 (currently amended): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 27, further comprising a locking device for retaining the first spring tensioned in-a the second opening movement phase and when the flap is lowered.

Claim 29 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 28, further comprising means for releasing the locking device before a subsequent opening of the flap.

Claim 30 (original): The vehicle hinge as claimed in claim 29, wherein one of the first link and the second link is pretensioned by the first spring, and wherein the release means is arranged on said pretensioned link.

Claim 31 (currently amended): A vehicle, comprising:

a vehicle body,
a flap,
a four-joint flap hinge comprising a first link and a second link, the first link and the second link each being pivotably attached to the vehicle body and to the flap,
a gas-filled spring assigned to the vehicle body and to the flap, and
a first spring arranged on the vehicle body, the first spring being in a tensioned position when the flap is closed and urging the flap into an opening direction,

wherein, starting from a closed position of the flap, the vehicle hinge opening movement comprises a first opening phase of the flap and a second opening phase of the flap subsequent to said first opening phase of the flap.

wherein one of the first link and the second link comprises a portion coming into contact with said first spring and tensioning the first spring back into said tensioned position in a the second opening phase of the flap.

Claim 32 (currently amended): The vehicle according to claim 31, wherein one of the first link and the second link is pretensioned by the first spring for urging the flap into an the opening direction, and wherein the pretensioned link also comprises the portion for tensioning the first spring back into said tensioned position.

Claim 33 (original): The vehicle according to claim 32 further comprising a locking device for retaining the first spring in said tensioned position, such that the first spring is kept unreleased when the flap is lowered.